

Does Training and Development have an Age Ceiling? Evidence from Elderly Teachers in Private Schools in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: In the rapidly growing ageing arena, this paper intends to examine the existing training and development practices among the private sector schools in Sri Lanka regarding re-employed elderly teachers. This is a qualitative study which collected data from 10 private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The findings of the study implied that private sector schools in Sri Lanka provide inadequate training and development opportunities for ETs. Prevailing T&D opportunities in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka are often restricted access to the ETs by means of stipulating age limits and easily assuming that ETs have already been trained and thereby they do not need further training.

Keywords: *Training and Development, Elderly Teachers, Private Schools*

I. Introduction

Employee training and development (T&D) is inevitable as it creates benefits for individual employees, organizations, and broadly for the workforce in a country. The concept of training has been cited in the study of Garavan (1997) comprehensively as, “a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skills and attitudes through learning experiences, to achieve effective performance in an activity or a range of activities.” Conversely, development is an on-going process, expanding the employee’s potentials through formal or informal means (ibid). Furthermore, scholars differentiate the meaning of those concepts in relation to the purpose, focus, and time span: “Job-specific training seeks to improve effectiveness in a current job role, whereas development activities take a longer-term perspective and may extend into career planning and reviews of personal progress” (Warr, 2002). T & D is vital for an economy where labour supply is in a shortfall and prevailing rising ageing population.

Population of Sri Lanka is one of the fastest ageing countries in the world (Vodopivec&Arunatilake, 2008). Further, population projections confirmed that, Sri Lanka is on the brink of labour shortage in another decade or so (De Silva, 2012). Hence, it is of paramount importance to explore the possibilities of utilizing the untapped labour force, i.e. ageing population who are willing and capable of engaging in labour market. At present school education sector in Sri Lanka is one of the important areas which is suffering from a dearth of qualified teachers for both the public and private sector schools. As an alternative solution, the schools tend to re-employ government retired teachers, especially among the private sector schools (Madhuwanthi, 2016). Therefore, this paper aimed at examining the existing training and development practices among the private sector schools in Sri Lanka regarding re-employed elderly teachers. T&D facilitates elderly employees to keep them re-skilled in an up to date is a timely necessity so that they can remain competitive in the job market.

II. Literature Review

Human capital theory mainly describes the rationale behind providing training for employees based on the economic costs and benefits or briefly returns on investment (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1962). If the provisioning of a training would yield net economic benefits to either (or both) the employee and the organization, then the employer decides to go ahead with the decision. The net benefit to the employer is derived through increased productivity and the profitability of the organization over the time. At this point, the employer is cautious about to whom the training should be given, and the decision is often age discriminatory, assuming that the job tenure of the younger employee

is comparatively longer than EEs for gaining returns and thereby priority is given to the younger employees. However, it can be argued that EEs show a great deal of employment stability (Auer &Fortuny, 2000) and less employee turnover (Chiu et al., 2001), which may lead to have long job tenure and greater accrual of benefits to the organization compared with young workers.

However, it is well documented that employers have been largely remiss in providing training for older employees. The literature on elderly employment alleges that employers are hesitant to provide training for EEs by denying them access to training, designing inappropriate training methods, the learning environment for EEs, and the unavailability of age awareness training for managers (Stassen &Templer, 2005). Moreover, employers in the same study in the Canadian context claimed that the main reason for not providing training for EEs was a lack of interest among the EEs in taking part in training programmes. The budgetary constraints and elderly training were non-prioritized matters of the organization and were other grounds for overlooking training by the employers (ibid). It was found that some of the managers that are responsible for provisioning re/training are unlikely to appreciate the potentials of older workers, which demonstrates explicit discrimination against EEs based on the preconceived notions of the older workers' capacity for re/training (Smith, 1997).

Gray and McGregor (2003) mentioned four common negative stereotypes related to training and development of EEs: a) they do not want to learn, b) they cannot learn, c) they are afraid of new technology, and d) investment in training of EEs provides poor returns. A meta-analysis included 418 empirical studies in the U.S.A. was carried out by Ng and Feldman (2012) and they concluded that the stereotype of older workers as being less willing to engage in further career development and training activities was consistent with the cumulated research evidence. After reviewing the multivariate literature on the likelihood of employees' participation in job-related training in the U.K., the U.S.A. and Canada (Wooden, Van den Heuvel, Cully, & Curtain, 2001) confidently concluded that EEs are less likely to receive or participate in training. They also found that this relationship between age and training varied with the type of training offered. Therefore, as suggested by Stassen and Templer, (2005), it is suitable for organizing training programmes and training methods that meet the needs, preferences, and learning styles of older employees so as to avoid such circumstances. A similar approach may be required for training for elderly teachers.

Teachers are supposed to reflect continuous professional development throughout career training by updating their subject knowledge, adapting novel teaching methodologies, and acquiring specialized skills, including information technology (International Labour Organization, 2012) because the quality of school education vastly depends upon the quality of the teacher. It is essential to provide training for teachers that have discontinued/retired from their profession and returned to schools. This is because Redman and Snape's study found that employers still have stereotypical beliefs on the "adaptability" dimension of elderly teachers, which includes their adaptability to change, to learn and to be trained, and to accept new technology (2002). This underscores the fact that, if the schools do need to keep elderly teachers in the cadre as a solution for the shortage of teachers, it is necessary to provide training for them to overcome adaptability issues rather than merely holding such perceptions. Otherwise, as indicated by Gray and McGregor (2003), the absence of opportunities for the training and development of EEs will have serious implications, such as the feeling of having outdated skills and under-performing their jobs compared to younger workers, considering themselves as a marginalized group and a demoralized elderly workforce, which ultimately will further keep them away from the labour force.

III. Methodology

Examining prevailing T & D practices towards the ETs in the private schools in Sri Lanka was explored as a qualitative research study, where data can be collected in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, using multiple data collection methods (such as interviews, observation, and searching of documents and websites rather than relying on single a data source), analyzing themes and relationships through inductive and deductive logic and finally bringing the participant's voices in a holistic manner (Creswell, 2013). The sample size of the study was 10 schools from the Western province, which records the highest number of private sector schools in SL. A brief profile of the chosen schools and participants are given in the table 1.

Table 1 Summary of the Schools and the Participants

School	Information about the School					Information about the Participant					
	Type	Size*	Location	No. of Students	No. of Teachers	Position	Age	Gender	Education	Working Experience	Serving in the school (years)
1	Int.	S	City	250	30	Chairman/Principal	45	Male	Postgraduate	Educationist	9
2	Int.	S	Suburban	350	40	Principal	63	Female	Advance Level	Educationist	6
3	Int.	S	City	390	50	Principal	69	Male	Postgraduate	Business Mgt.	5
4	Pvt.	M	City	1650	76	Principal	72	Female	Postgraduate	Educationist	28
5	Pvt.	M	City	2500	130	Principal	63	Female	Postgraduate	Educationist	1
6	Int.	M	Suburban	2500	255	Managing Director/Principal	76	Male	Postgraduate	Educationist	15
7	Pvt.	L	City	6700	330	Principal	67	Female	Postgraduate	Educationist	6
8**	Int.	L	City	5000	600	Coordinating Principal	41	Female	Postgraduate	Educationist	9
9**	Int.	L	City	15500	1700	Directress/Principal	52	Female	Postgraduate	Educationist	22
10***	Pvt.	L	City	42500	2100	General Manager	51	Male	Postgraduate	Educationist	9

* Size of school: S- Small school M- Medium school L- Large school

**Schools with branches

*** Collection of Catholic schools

Int- International school Pvt-

Unaided

Private

School

IV. Data Analysis and Findings

As long as teachers are engaging in the profession, training is an essential part of their career irrespective of the age of the teacher. It updates the knowledge, upgrades the teaching skills, and upholds the confidence of the teachers. However, the literature consistently complained that elderly employees are highly discriminated against in the area of training and development. Thus, I explored training and development practices which are implemented in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka, with special emphasis on ETs.

Almost all the interviewees mentioned that one of the major reasons for employing ETs in their schools was “the commendable government training they have undergone,” which underscores the vitality of trained teachers in the education system. Therefore, I initially inquired about the extent of adopting training and development practices in the schools and then probed the equal provisioning of training opportunities to the teachers.

Though the schools have admired teacher training to such an extent, among the interviewees only one large IS had a proper teacher training unit to provide training for the internal teachers at the school, including ETs. Another 2 ISs had taken occasional training efforts informally through workshops and seminars.

As interviewees from the UPSs have mentioned that the teaching cadre of the UPSs is consisted of the government approved permanent cadre and the excess cadre of temporary/contract teachers. According to the interviewees from the UPSs, their training focus was mainly targeting contract basis young teachers in the excess cadre, purporting to absorb them into the government approved permanent cadre after the training. They are either university graduates or Advanced Level qualified candidates; they may not go through teacher training. Therefore, the school administration directs them to follow the training courses conducted by the government training institutes such as the National Colleges of Education, the National Institute of Education, the education faculties in the National Universities and support them to be professionally qualified. Some UPSs have the training policy of annually sending a few of such selected young contract teachers to government programmes as full-time trainees with a paid leave for several years, but those trainees have to serve after the training for a certain period with the same school.

Since ETs are considered as trained teachers and they are not in the permanent cadre in the school, and the UPSs do not make special efforts to address their training needs, other than sending them to certain workshops and seminars organized by the Ministry of Education. They consider it as an “informal training arrangement,” which means non-regular and short-term programmes. The programmes of the ministry are mainly for the teachers in the government schools. Knowing that the UPSs have limited access to such programmes, the principals of UPSs are striving hard to get opportunities, as discussed in the following:

We are not invited for such workshops and seminars, but we request them to allow our staff (including elderly teachers) to take part in those programmes. Because we all teach national curriculum for the students and those programmes are very useful. (Interviewee 6)

Additionally, 3 schools have their own professional teacher training centers, where one is a UPS and the other 2 are ISs, yet the main purpose of them is not to cater to internal teacher training needs but to external candidates.

It was quite unanticipated that having recognized the dearth of trained teachers in the private sector schools and strongly emphasizing the importance of teacher training and development, very few initiatives have been taken to address this issue. That aroused the curiosity to search for the causes behind the lack of teacher training opportunities in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The following excerpts from some of the interviewees depicted their commitment and perception of teacher training in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka:

An interviewee from a small IS said that “*teacher training is not at the priority of our school agenda.*” (Interviewee 10)

Another interviewee from a large IS said that “*while teachers are engaging in teaching in the schools, they are gradually sharpening their skills.*” (Interviewee 3)

According to interviewee 6, “*young teachers attend training programmes, but not government retired teachers. It is because they have gone through a good training.*”

Seemingly the schools were not much concerned about providing training under their own presumptions and justifications. Additionally, some of the interviewees revealed that organizing training sessions involved a huge cost and the school was unable to retain such budgetary allocation. Therefore, the schools did not conduct training programmes but always tried to absorb trained teachers for the school in order to fill that vacuum. This is a clear reflection of employers’ attitude towards training of teachers. They consider training as a costly affair and that has to be changed and training to be treated as future investment. The size of the budget for teacher training is a significant indicator for measuring the quality of education provided by the schools.

The interviewees alleged that, though they organized some teacher training, the poor participation of ETs could be found. Unlike young teachers, ETs are hesitant to participate. Possibly, they believe that they have undergone adequate government training and it is not necessary for them to have further training. The opinion of interviewee 4 was that *“retired teachers dislike participating in training programmes. It is their attitude.”*

One interviewee stated that the school sometimes conducts training programmes such as student counseling for all the teaching staff, but the active participation of ETs cannot be observed in those programmes. Similar finding was noted in a study regarding the negative attitudes of ETs toward professional development due to the extra time and extra efforts needed (Nabhani, Bahous& Hamdan, 2012). Not only that, but such attitudes are sometimes backed up by the perceptions held by the principals and employers as well. The reason is that some interviewees were of the opinion of that *“retired teachers are well-trained. They do not need further training.”* This attitude itself discourages ETs from participating in the training programmes of the school. Therefore, an attitudinal change is required for both the ETs and the employers in terms of organizing more training and motivating all the teachers to take part in those programmes irrespective of age.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned above, some schools provided training opportunities for teachers. Among them, several schools give priority to younger teachers and others provide training for all the teachers, including ETs. They have very positive attitudes toward training, believing that teacher training is an investment which brings future returns to the school. Two ISs (one was a small school and the other a medium-scale school) organize informal training programmes whilst another large IS has its own training unit.

Interviewee 5, representing a medium-size IS, shared the way he organized training for teachers. He is a well-experienced (nationally and internationally) retired principal from a government school. Therefore, he conducted training sessions by himself instead of hiring external trainers. It may be a cost reduction technique as well. His training focus was mainly on younger teachers. Further, he believed that trained government teachers do not need additional training. He recognized the training requirements of teachers based on the weaknesses and areas of incompetence indicated by the teachers. Training sessions were conducted after school hours on an occasional basis. His style of organizing training, in his own words, was the following: *“my focus is young teachers. When I found their deficiencies, I frequently conduct some training sessions after school in order to impart my long-held knowledge and skills on them.”*

Interviewee 9, representing a small IS, shared her perspectives towards training. She is also an experienced retired principal from a government school, and she highly valued teacher training. She highlighted that the absence of a proper training arm for the private sector education is a huge vacuum for the professional development of the teachers in the private sector. Their school is a small one and it cannot allocate many resources for teacher training in light of their financial constraints. Yet, her commitment to teacher training was strongly reflected through the following statement: *“Somehow or other we need to train our teachers. That is the most important thing.”* Therefore, she personally made efforts to organize training for all the teachers with the support of known teacher trainers and educationists from the government institutes. Moreover, she strongly believed that elderly teachers still should be required to update their knowledge with the contemporary world. Hence, she always encouraged ETs to take part in the training workshops, as she states in the following:

The quality of the teacher is mainly reflected through the training received. How fortunate government teachers are to undergo a comprehensive training and practical exposure before entering into the career which is a missed opportunity to the teachers of private sector schools. In order to bridge that gap I personally organize workshops, seminars with the help of some resource personnel from the government educational institutes. (Interviewee 9)

Comparing the two training scenarios from two ISs revealed that the employer's attitudes towards the ETs highly affected the choice of training practices for the teachers in the schools rather than the size of the school, because both interviewees had come from similar work backgrounds; but the interviewee from the small school had a positive attitude toward the necessity of training ETs even if the school has financial constraints.

It is interesting to note that a large IS is operating its own Teacher Empowerment Unit to assist teachers that need support to develop their teaching skills. The unit is staffed by qualified teacher trainers, educationists, and mentors. It is open for both the young and elderly teachers to improve their teaching methods, language assistance, and any other guidance related to teaching. Not only that, but their training desirability is also reflected by the computer laboratory that the school owns. It is open to students as well as teaching staff. Having realized the vitality of IT skills, the school always motivates teachers to acquire and improve their computer skills. The school frequently conducts training sessions for teachers, including ETs. In addition, teachers are encouraged to spend their free time in the computer laboratory and practice IT lessons with the help of computer instructors, as described in the following:

We believe all the teachers are required to participate in variety of training programmes we organize to update their knowledge and skills, irrespective of the age. Apart from that, we asked the teachers, whenever they have difficulties in any area, they can get the support from the teacher empowerment unit. That unit is consisted of qualified trainers and mentors. Especially newly recruited young teachers are supposed to work with a mentor for six months. (Interviewee 2)

Moreover, this school has a well-recognized teacher training academy, which offers a number of training programmes, both general and tailor-made, for the external candidates. Another large IS too has a teacher training center which offers internationally recognized montessori teacher training courses for external teachers. An interviewee from an UPS described about their teacher training institute, which is an internationally-accredited professional teacher training institute and operates as a separate business entity to provide training courses for the external candidates, but not as a training facilitator for the internal teachers of the school. It seems that all three teacher training institutes are additional businesses of the schools. Their target is young candidates. However, they mentioned that the trainees that are qualified from those training institutes sometimes get an opportunity to join the same schools. Those teacher training institutes addressed the need for facilitating teacher training for private sector schools (especially for ISs).

According to the descriptions of the interviewees regarding the extent of commitment to training practice among the private sector schools, they indicated the necessity of further attention to teacher training in private sector education, even for young teachers. Chasing after English language proficiency among the schools may leave behind other important aspects such as child psychology and pedagogical knowledge. Training opportunities for ETs are at a minimal level, as it is believed that they are “trained enough.” Instead of teacher training, employers try to attract trained teachers; either government retired or privately trained teachers thinking that training is a huge cost for the school. Beyond that, few initiatives were elaborated by the interviewees for further development of teachers in the private sector schools. Seemingly the private sector schools have largely ignored or underestimated the core component of education, that is, teacher training, which echoes the quality of education.

Conversely, the reluctance or non-participation of ETs to train because they are satisfied with the training they have undergone or have lazy attitudes towards training is another serious concern. It sometimes curtails their training opportunities. However, in today’s knowledge economy, teachers are required to undergo continuous training to catch up with new knowledge, adopt new teaching methodologies, acquire modern skills like IT, and change their attitudes.

It was found that the differences in implementing (or non-implementing) the training practices of the private sector schools was mainly determined by the attitudes of the employer/principal towards the significance (or not significance) of training. No relationship could be observed according to the size or type of the school.

Conclusion

This study intends to examine the existing training and development practices for re-employed ETs teachers in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The findings of the study implied that private sector schools in Sri Lanka provide inadequate training and development opportunities for ETs. Prevailing T&D opportunities in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka are often restricted access to the ETs by means of stipulating age limits and easily assuming that ETs have already been trained and thereby they do not need further training. Recruiting the best teachers is a partial fulfillment of the quality of education, but continuously developing their career, and providing them with support, guidance, and opportunities represent the other half of quality education. Hence, training and development opportunities are equally applicable to the ETs so that they can keep up with the changes taking place in the modern education arena.

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